



S.L.I.D.  
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TRACTS  
No. 2

# STEWART TRAINING

IN C.I.O. UNIONS

MILDRED BERSH

Student League for Industrial Democracy



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### STEWART TRAINING IN C. I. O. UNIONS

by

Mildred Bersh



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### About the Author

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Much of the research for this Tract was done by the author during her participation in Steward Training sessions at a C. I. O. Leadership Training Institute. In addition, Miss Bersh has been an associate editor of the Connecticut State C. I. O. Yearbook and a staff member of the New York State C. I. O. Yearbook for the past several years. She is also a member of the American Newspaper Guild, C. I. O.

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### Note

The editors wish to express their thanks to Mr. Lawrence Rogin, Educational Director of the Textile Workers Union of America, who read this Tract while it was a manuscript, and to Dr. Harry W. Laidler, Executive Director of the L. I. D. and Mr. James Farmer, Student Field Secretary of the L. I. D., who have served as advisory editors and whose comments and advice have been most helpful in preparing this and other Tracts.

### STEWARD TRAINING IN CIO UNIONS

While many volumes have been devoted to the growth and development of the trade union movement, the men and women representing the cornerstone of the local union have been sadly neglected by historians of this subject. These workingmen and workingwomen are called "shop committeemen", "shop chairmen", "job stewards", "local representatives", "union committeemen", and "shop stewards". But, no matter what their title may be, they represent a vital link in the line of communication between worker and management in the daily relationships in the plant.

In factories, shops and offices across the country, thousands of CIO stewards are serving the men and women with whom they work, without remuneration, by acting as their representatives in their day to day relationships with management. In most cases, these relationships pertain to the rights and responsibilities of both labor and management under the union contract. By handling grievances, the steward is given the responsibility of transforming a piece of paper stating wages, hours and working conditions into an actual living document.

The steward not only serves to represent union members in their relationship with management, but also acts as a link between rank and file and the international union officers. It is his job to translate the attitudes, needs and demands of local members to higher level leadership, and to instruct the membership about the union's policies and programs. To many workers, the shop steward is "the Union", as he is the officer who comes in daily contact with every union member.



It is therefore, of primary importance to the functioning of the union as well as to the welfare of top level leadership, that stewards be informed of their duties, and have an understanding of the CIO's and the international union's program. With this end in mind, many CIO international unions have organized steward training programs.

It would seem from the foregoing discussion of a steward's functions that his role in the union would become an increasingly influential one with the expansion of trade unions in both size and scope. There would seem to be a greater need for the steward to bridge the growing gap and serve as a liaison between the attitudes and functions of the rank and file workers and those of the top level leadership. And yet the role of the steward has now become a moot question. Some argue that with the increasing power of labor leaders, the power of the steward is being usurped in many cases by higher echelon members of the labor hierarchy. The steward's role is now being compared by some to that of the foreman, where top level negotiations render him impotent, aside from being a link in a communication line.

Others feel that the increased responsibility of trade unions in the economic, social and political sphere warrants central guidance of all union affairs, and the steward must of necessity relinquish some of his power. And still another group uses the same argument with reference to the union's greater size and scope to support their theory that stewards have a greater responsibility now than ever before. Whether his role now is of greater or lesser importance, there is no questioning the fact that educational activity in his behalf has increased manifold.

## Forms of CIO Training

In general, it may be said that steward training receives its impetus from two sources: 1) from within the CIO itself, conducted by the unions' educational directors, staff members and experienced stewards; and 2) from fringe groups outside the labor movement, e.g., extension divisions of universities. The writer will deal first with the work the CIO has accomplished in this field, and devote the final portion to an examination of steward training as conducted by Cornell University and other peripheral groups.

Before mentioning the various classes and institutes conducted by unions, it should be stated at the outset that many local unions have no steward training program whatsoever, nor are any sources of training available to them. Local union leaders are often bogged down by organizational and administrative details and have no time, and, in some cases, no interest in a training or education program. Other locals may lack the financial resources to carry out such a program. This lack of time, finances and ability may combine to produce a group of apathetic and unskilled stewards. Where no steward training is available, a steward may be briefed by a staff man in the area. However, this type of training has proved to be rather inadequate when compared with formalized training.<sup>1</sup>

New stewards are sometimes shown the ropes

1. Lawrence Rogin, Interview (Textile Workers Union of America, March 31, 1954).



by older officers who go over the contract and union literature with them. If there are sufficient stewards appointed or elected during the same period of time, group classes may be set up. Or where no formal class is held, the stewards' meetings will provide opportunity for acquiring information and skills. Clauses in the contract may be analyzed, or guest speakers invited on timely topics of concern to labor. Though better than no training whatsoever, this haphazard method of acquiring sundry information is vastly inferior to the formal training acquired in courses set up for this purpose. There are still large numbers of stewards in the CIO today who receive their training in this random manner.

Approaching the constructive phases of the union's work in this field, we find that steward classes are conducted at local unions on a one-night a week basis, for six, eight, or ten to twelve weeks. These classes may be conducted by the union itself or in cooperation with universities that do work in the field of workers' education.

In some regions of the United Automobile Workers Union, a widespread training program is conducted by the staff representatives who work in the particular region. In one or two cases, the regional directors require that the staff members conduct at least one steward training program for each local union they represent every year. More common, however, is training conducted at the weekend institutes which are scheduled in areas where the union has a concentrated membership. During the winter-spring season of 1952-1953, more than 130 institutes were conducted by the UAW in various places throughout the United States.<sup>2</sup> Instructors, aside from UAW staff

2. Brendan Sexton, letter to the author (United Automobile Workers Union, Oct. 14, 1953).

members, may be invited from a university or local government agency. From six to eighteen hours of intensive training may be offered in one weekend.<sup>3</sup>

These educational activities are carried on within the CIO on local, city-wide, state-wide, regional and national levels. Sometimes they are supplemented by the National CIO Education and Research Department, one of whose jobs is to assist individual CIO international unions and regional industrial union councils in their training programs.

Where locals are too small and weak to have any kind of education, they may be undertaken by a joint board or regional office of the international in that particular area. Regional offices and joint boards generally have the finances and manpower to run such a program for many locals, while the individual local itself may be impotent.

Probably the most popular type of training in the CIO are summer schools. In the summer of 1951, 40 schools were held by CIO affiliates, and were attended by 4500 CIO members.<sup>4</sup> With the rapid growth of these schools, judging by figures received from individual international CIO unions in 1953, the total of both schools and attending members in all of CIO will be many times greater by the close of 1954.

3. Ammunition (detroit:UAW, V. 9 No. 4, April 1951) p. 29.

4. CIO Training for Active and Effective Leadership (U. S. Department of Labor Bulletin, No. 1114



Summer schools offer an effective kind of training for stewards, as there is more time, and the atmosphere more relaxed than the one-day and week-end programs. Schools are usually held at centers which have facilities for housing, meals, and recreation. Swimming, baseball or other sports are available during the afternoon free period. Where recreation is combined with education, there is a better<sup>5</sup> chance for healthy group relations to develop.

A student council, elected early in the course, or the staff, arranges entertainment to follow the evening sessions. Union songs, sung either by a guitar-playing leader, the entire group, or by benefit of a phonograph, add warmth and unity to the group. Posters and bulletin boards provide atmosphere as well as demonstrate educational techniques.

During the summers of 1952 and 1953, 7 summer institutes were held by the Textile Workers Union, of which six were co-sponsored by the National CIO Education Department. Joint institutes enable the staff members of TWUA to handle training in Textile Union problems, while National CIO provides competent instructors for political action and general labor subjects. In addition to this advantage, TWUA members were broadened by their contacts with other CIO unionists, with members of each union becoming acquainted with the others' problems.<sup>6</sup>

5. Mildred Bersh, "Steward Training", 1954 Connecticut State CIO Yearbook, p. 30.

6. Educational Report in preparation for Textile Workers Union Convention, April, 1954, Atlantic City, N. J. (borrowed from the files of TWUA)

Stewards in the United Automobile Workers Union received training in 1953 at 22 one-week summer schools, held in various parts of the United States and Canada. More than 4000 representatives of local unions attended the summer schools, and about half of these were stewards and committeemen.<sup>7</sup>

The number of students in attendance at the individual schools varies considerably, ranging from about twenty-five to several hundred students. The proportion of women delegates at these schools is usually low, probably for the same reasons that women do not have the time to become stewards in the first place, on account of responsibilities to family and home. However, many male stewards are encouraged to bring their wives to these union training schools, where separate courses are set up for the wives. The author instructed one such course on "History and Goals of Trade Unions" where one of the motives of the course was to explain to these union wives that the time their husbands spent away from home attending to union affairs was time spent in a noble cause. Conditions were described before and after a union was organized, and the need for maintaining and building a strong union was presented to them in terms which had meaning for them.

In addition to the increased skills and understanding acquired at summer schools, personal contacts brought about by a week of living and talking together result in a greater feeling of unity in the organization. Most important of all is the creation of a sense of belonging, and of being part of a dynamic and important movement. And for practical results, these schools have proved to be an inspiration for

7. Sexton, letter to the author.



hard work once stewards have returned to the plant or mill.<sup>8</sup>

One of the students at a CIO summer school had this to say of his experiences at the institute:

"It's a wonderful feeling for one of the students to walk around the campus, meeting people you have never met before, and exchanging ideas...for these are the instruments that create better relationships and good will.

"We work together..we train together, we learn together..we solve our problems together.

"If this kind of training, if this feeling of learning, doing...working things out together were distributed throughout the world by all national organizations, we would be closer to international understanding and peace than ever before.<sup>9</sup>

Steward training is voluntary in most unions, and those who wish may avail themselves of this opportunity. However, the United Automobile Workers' constitution has recently been revised to make it possible for local unions to require stewards to participate in training classes.<sup>10</sup> Many UAW locals now have such requirements.

8. Rogin, Interview.

9. The Hi-Light (Port Huron: FDR-CIO Labor Institute, August 16, 1950) p. 1.

10. Among the unions affiliated with the AFL, the ILGWU has had similar constitutional provisions for many years.

The largest local to take such action thus far is Briggs Local 212, where more than 600 stewards are required to undergo training if they wish to continue their posts.<sup>11</sup>

At this same local union, a group of fifteen local union officers are being trained as discussion leaders by the UAW Education Department. These leaders will then conduct the leadership training sessions for the shop steward.

It will be interesting to observe whether or not compulsory training in the UAW will establish a precedent affecting education and training in other international CIO unions.

### Course Content

As to the contents of the various courses, they vary somewhat depending upon the union, the institute, and the student body. In some cases, the instructor who trains stewards cannot plan his course until he has met with the group and learned some facts about these stewards' previous training. In a very heterogeneous group, some stewards will have had training at summer schools or elsewhere and achieved a degree of trade union and political sophistication. Others will be relatively new to the trade union movement and may lack a consciousness of social and economic events. The instructor may have to teach the course on a level which will fit neither group perfectly. The more homogeneous the group in the class, the easier it will be to reach every steward on his own level and make the course a more valuable one.

At some schools, such as those conducted by the Textile Workers Union, the courses are designed

11. Sexton, letter to the author.



to be introductory as well as terminal, and the same people are not allowed to volunteer for training each year. Where they have experimented with advanced courses for many students, the summer school became more of a vacation than a training period.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, some of the UAW schools offer elementary as well as advanced courses on a particular subject, and stewards are encouraged to return the following year and continue their training.

The most practical training given to stewards relates to their handling of grievances. They are taught above all to know their contract, know their department, know the workers in their shop, and know their grievance procedure. The grievance procedure is the heart of the contract, and contract enforcement and industrial relations in the company depend upon these procedures. Workers are not only trained in handling grievances, but are also taught to recognize the difference between a real grievance (violation of the contract or unfair treatment by the company) and a bad grievance (personal differences or mistake in fact).<sup>13</sup>

Another of the "tool courses" is the union's approach to time study. Where the union has an engineering department, this course is generally given by one of their engineers or time-study men. The International Union of Electrical Workers, one of the younger CIO unions, held its

12. Rogin, Interview.

13. 20 Questions and Answers for TWUA Stewards, p.14.

first week-long institute in the summer of 1953 and offered courses on time study and job evaluation. The phase of the time study course which the students found most interesting, and which they predicted to be most valuable to them upon return to their shops, was learning to take a time study themselves. After mastering the details involved in taking a time study, they practiced clocking the teacher in simple activities such as writing on the blackboard. In the job evaluation course, the group studied the different types of plans in use and the varying emphasis given in each plant to skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Both the ranking method of job evaluation and the point rating system were discussed.<sup>14</sup>

Aside from the practical courses in time and motion study, collective bargaining, union administration, and techniques in getting out a union newspaper, courses are offered in international affairs, wage stabilization, community services, human relations, political action, public relations and civil rights.<sup>15</sup>

In a political action course, for instance, the stewards are reminded that the fight for better wages and working conditions did not begin and end in the shop; that our country's laws and regulations are just as much a part of a contract as a clause on pensions. Union leaders point out that the Taft-Hartley Act, which may be to the workers'

14. The IUE-CIO News (Washington, D. C. : International Union of Electrical Workers, July 6, 1953)

15. Barbara Briggs, Shop Steward's Manual (New York: Workers Education. Bureau, 1948) p. 20.



disadvantage, and the Wagner Act, which afforded him protection, were enacted by the men workers helped to elect. Urging the membership to vote intelligently and elect those who will act in the best interests of labor and the community is one of the steward's responsibilities.<sup>16</sup> The steward learns that in order to take an active and intelligent part in labor's political activities, he should read newspapers, attend classes, and take full advantage of our many media of communication. Such action will help him to build up a knowledge and understanding, not only of his union and the labor movement, but of his community and the national and international scene.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to his role in the political action arena, the steward is taught to be an educator as well. He has to provide all new members with copies of the union contract and explain their responsibilities as union members. He is trained to stimulate greater participation on the part of each union member, thus strengthening the union. And he must know how to develop leadership and utilize the ability of the members in his department.

He is instructed to remind his membership several days in advance of meetings, classes and other union events. He is expected to attend all

16. Steward's and Committeemen's Pocket Guide (Detroit: Uaw, 1951) p. 17.

17. How to Win for the Union, A Handbook for UAW-CIO Stewards and Committeemen (Detroit: UAW, 1943) p. 49.

union meetings himself, and thus set an example for the others. He is trained in realizing the importance of pamphlets, leaflets and bulletin boards in unionizing his membership.<sup>18</sup> (unionizing as distinguished from organizing).

Sometimes the students do not fully approve of the contents of their courses. One instructor, teaching a course on the shop steward as union representative, remarked that the students would have been more interested in a course on "Human Relations in the Clothing Industry"<sup>19</sup>. Possibly the fact that many women were registered in the course is a factor which may account for the human relations interest.

However, the human interest is not an attribute exclusively held by the female. A UAW stewards' guide, whose membership is primarily male, states that the steward's job is mainly one of dealing with people, and, therefore, the human relations aspect of his activities is a vital one.<sup>20</sup>

While the content of union leadership training courses has received its share of criticism from right-wing groups, it has been criticized by left-wing (but anti-Communist) groups as well. These left-of-center critics look dismally upon some of the union education programs, especially those which emphasize technical training for union service, i.e., grievance handling, collective bargaining, union administration, etc. They

18. Steward's and Committeemen's Pocket Guide, p. 17.

19. William C. McMillan, "Shop Steward Training" Spring 1949, Local 169, Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (from the files of Cornell University Extension Division)

20. Stewards Guide, Hints on Bargaining and Grievance Procedure (West Side Local 174, UAW)



16 point out the need for a more rounded education with its emphasis on the social sciences along with a critical approach to the problems of the world. They feel union programs should seek to create among the students a desire for intelligent social change as well as promote activity in political and community affairs.<sup>21</sup>

Union leaders, on the other hand, point out that their educational activities are never limited to a narrow form of training for union jobs. Training of shop stewards often includes background work in labor history as well as studies of labor and the community, labor and political action, etc. Union counsellors take an active part in social and community problems. And the unions' fast-developing role in the international scene is reflected in the exchange of worker-students between this country and countries abroad. American labor leaders are working closely with European and Asian trade unions in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and other international agencies.<sup>22</sup>

### Pedagogic Techniques

It is often said of university lectures that material will pass from the notebook of the professor to the notebook of the student without going through the head of either. To eliminate the possibility of such an occurrence, union leaders utilize techniques which will require the active participation of the students.

21. Theodore Schapiro, "The Challenge of Workers' Educational "Adult Education, February, 1951, p. 22.  
22. Orlie Pell, *Ibid.*, p. 98.

To appreciate the techniques which are generally used, the goals of steward training should be kept in mind. Specifically these goals may be summarized as follows:

- 1) to stimulate democratic leadership.
- 2) to suggest a way of thinking and an approach regarding specific union problems.
- 3) to apply this method to specific union problems, i.e., developing leadership, handling grievances.
- 4) to develop a better understanding of how the local union operates; of the relations between the local and the international union, and of the responsibilities of local officers to members of their local.
- 5) to arouse an identification with the union's goals and programs, or, unionizing the organized.

To achieve these ends, union leaders have abandoned the traditional teaching methods used when these stewards were back in grammar school. Classes are small; the approach is informal. Every part of the course is designed to stimulate thought and interest.

Union leaders have found through experience that discussion groups are much more effective than lectures. In steward training classes particularly, discussion enables members to exchange information on how they handle similar problems in different departments or in different locals. Discussion encourages the members of a group to analyze facts and information so that they will be less likely targets for indoctrination and propaganda.<sup>23</sup>

23. A.A. Liveright, Union Leadership Training (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951) p. 93.



Some leaders take exception to the feeling that the discussion method is the most effective technique. They feel that while stewards may give the right answers to questions, it does not necessarily follow that they will act in the way they know is correct.<sup>24</sup> Memorizing and repeating the proper procedures is only part of the battle won. The crucial test is-- will the steward follow that course of action?

Some unions use oral quizzes, organized in the form of two opposing teams, each team choosing its own name. Questions are based on the contract of their particular plant. Points are scored according to the number of questions answered correctly by each team. Following are typical questions asked of the members of a team:<sup>25</sup>

- 1) What does the contract say about workload changes?
- 2) What happens if a worker reports to work and there is no work for him through no fault of his own. Does he get paid?
- 3) What does the contract say about transfers from one job to another?

This method, if handled properly, is a valuable one, because it arouses interest. However, the danger lies in the fact that it may arouse the competitive spirit to a point where students are more concerned with accumulating points than with correctly analyzing the contract.

Another method of a similar nature is the quiz panel program. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers

24. Rogin, Interview

25. Teaching Guide for TWUA Stewards (New York: TWUA) p. 20.

Union runs a "Labor Information Please" program with a moderator and several "experts" from their membership to answer questions. A score is kept for each expert, and in the event none of the experts can correctly answer the question, it is addressed to those in the audience. The expert with the highest score receives a prize. Scores of modifications of "Information Please" are now being used. Regardless of the variation of the quiz program - when they are not too complicated - they are effective.<sup>26</sup>

Written tests, which bear about the closest resemblance to old-style formal teaching, are occasionally given. These are usually presented in the form of multiple choice questions; as follows:<sup>27</sup>

- 1) If a worker has an obvious grievance (rate too low or too heavy work load), but is afraid to take it up, the steward should:
  - A. Take it up anyway.
  - B. Forget about it.
  - C. Wait a few weeks to see what happens.
  - D. Discuss the problem with the grievance committee or business agent.
- 2) At a union-management grievance meeting, when management proposes a solution to the grievance which the union had not thought of previously, the committee should:
  - A. Reject the proposal.
  - B. Take it on trial period.
  - C. Accept it if it seems reasonable.
  - D. Call a recess to think it over.

The afternoon sessions at summer schools very often consist of various workshops held simultaneously. A workshop consists of a small group of people

26. Liveright, op. cit., p. 153.

27. Teaching Guide for TWUA Stewards, p. 15.



working together on various kinds of projects. In all workshops, people work together and try to reach a common solution to a problem. Workshops may provide demonstration and practice in specific skills, combine facts, experience, and group discussion, or plan for local action. In addition to gaining information and know-how in handling grievances, stewards may participate in workshops and learn how to get out a newspaper, operate a motion picture projector, run a mimeograph machine, write and present radio speeches. Workshops usually have the enthusiastic approval of the student body.

Union officers, like most adults, often are surprised when they discover that education can be fun. The technique of role-playing is an effective one because it is fun. While group members are enjoying themselves, they become rapidly and completely involved in the dramatized situation.

Role-playing is an on-the-spot drama in which two or more people act out a situation based on a problem which the group is considering. It is especially effective in a small group where members can explore the problem together. The leader helps the group pick out or define the situation, then selects the actors or asks for volunteers. When the scene has been set and the action has begun, the leader cuts the scene when he feels that enough has been said on that particular subject.

When defining roles, the instructor either describes the character himself or has the group decide what kind of people they should be -- "belligerent", "timid", "just had a fight with his wife", "just had an argument with the foreman". The first time this is tried out, persons who are not self-conscious or easily embarrassed are generally chosen.<sup>28</sup>

28. Union Leadership And Administration, Instructor's Manual (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1950) p. 31.

After the scene has been cut, discussion is thrown open to the group. When discussing the good and bad points of role-playing, the instructors will use the role names of the actors rather than their actual names to avoid having the student consider any criticism a personal attack on his acting ability.<sup>29</sup>

A skit, "A Steward Signing Up a New Worker", is suggested by the Textile Workers Union Education Department. One student plays the part of the steward while the other takes the part of the new worker. Two skits are played on this theme; one takes place in a union shop where the worker will join the union; the other takes place in an open shop where the new worker may not join the union if he so desires. These skits train stewards to approach new members and inculcate the ideals and objectives of the union.<sup>30</sup>

Other skits are enacted by setting up a mock grievance, with two workers playing the roles of the foreman and the steward. Students are cautioned to keep the discussion brief and to the point. The entire class will then discuss the merit of the argument by the steward, and which points, if any, were omitted.

Role-playing has the advantage of arousing everyone's interest, including those not actually playing roles. Those participating in the act are given opportunity to practice and develop skills in dealing with people, and in articulating their thoughts. And as well as livening up a discussion, role-playing brings out feelings and attitudes which might not be revealed in an ordinary discussion.

29. Ibid., p. 46.

30. Teaching Guide for TWUA Stewards, p. 5.



There is a serious drawback to role-playing, its danger of becoming a gag. If the first drama is unsuccessful, in terms of it engendering more humor than enlightenment, it is very likely that subsequent role-playing sessions will follow the same pattern.<sup>31</sup> To remedy this situation, it may help to have the instructor play one of the roles, and thus guide the action.

Student stewards are not expected to memorize a mass of facts in one week-end or one week, but they receive a great deal of printed material which they can study later and use in their work. Some stewards are supplied by their union with a special steward's dictionary, supplying definitions of such terms as: arbitration, fringe benefits, checkoff, discrimination, down time incentive pay, job evaluation, probationary period, recall, reporting pay, shift premium, speedup, technological unemployment, etc.

The education Department of the United Automobile Workers Union issues a Stewards and Committeeman's Pocket Guide, a handy little looseleaf for all stewards, containing information on settling grievances, time study, major provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, Fair Labor Standards Act; lists of federal, state and city agencies, and helpful information on unemployment compensation, amendments to the Social Security law and workmen's compensation. The department also issues publications such as This Is the UAW-CIO, Winning Grievances, and the Manual for Local Union Shop Stewards which are found helpful by the newly-elected shop steward.

The Textile Workers Union publishes a Teachers Manual to be used with a Steward's Handbook for the use of business agents, local union presidents,

department chairmen and active stewards. Similarly, the United Rubber Workers and other major international unions in the CIO publish handbooks and guides for the use of their stewards.

In attempting to have students evaluate what they thought of their courses and of the training they received, questionnaires, buzz session and interviews have been used. The Education Director of the Textile Workers Union reports that these attempts at evaluation were not very successful in that the union officials were getting the answers which the students thought their leaders wanted.

The author's experience as an assistant staff member of the FDR-CIO Labor Center at Port Huron, Michigan in 1950 (sponsored by the Education Department, Michigan CIO Council) was somewhat different from the results reported by the TWUA in respect to evaluation. While questionnaires and buzz sessions were used, students did not refrain from bringing their gripes and criticisms directly to the instructors or staff members. Possibly the make-up of the student body is an important factor. These men were primarily automobile workers, members of a young, and until recently, turbulent union. After bloody organizing battles and tumultuous intra-union political bouts, these men did not refrain from offering a frank criticism of a steward training course. However, as the UAW has achieved a degree of intra-union harmony unknown in past years, it is just possible that they may not now be getting as honest an appraisal from the workers as they have in the past. However, there are always some rank and file workers who will consistently give a forthright opinion of policies and programs, union politics be damned.



There are several groups operating on the periphery of the labor movement and doing work in the field of workers' education. Among these are the American Labor Education Service, New York Chapter of the Women's Trade Union League, the Adult Education Association, the U.S. Department of Labor, the American Library Association (Labor Union Services) and U. N. E. S. C. O. (Workers' Education Division and Adult Education Activities). Probably the institutions which are doing the most in the field of workers' education and steward training, aside from the trade unions, are the universities throughout the country. To cite one example of the work which is being done by these universities, a study was made of Cornell University's Extension Division of the New York State School and Industrial Relations, with particular emphasis on their training courses for shop stewards.

The purpose of the extension division is to make the School's facilities available to adults throughout the State by providing classes, seminars, institutes and conferences for representatives of labor, industrial, business and governmental organizations, and the general public. It seeks to contribute to the improvement of relationships between these groups.

In developing educational programs for labor, the School consults with an Advisory Committee based on recommendations of the New York State CIO Council and the New York State Federation of Labor, as well as officials of independent unions.

Techniques used by extension teachers are very much the same as those used by union leaders at their own training schools. Methods range from the group discussion, role-playing, use of case

studies and workshop programs to the use of audio-visual aids.

Topics which are discussed in labor relations are often controversial. Inevitably, differing points of view will arise in a group. The teacher himself may have deep convictions on some controversial issue and might possibly be asked to give his opinion. He is encouraged by the School to give his opinion to the class when it will contribute to the learning situation, and identify the opinion as his own.<sup>32</sup>

One of the important differences between students at the Cornell School and those at a CIO summer school is that the stewards taking the Cornell course come to class after a day's work and have an even greater preference for an informal atmosphere in the classroom. They want freedom to comment, to exchange ideas and to work together on a problem. Though they come to school with a serious purpose, they like having some fun and a good laugh.

How is a course at Cornell actually developed? A course description serves as a guide in planning a course, and is either furnished by the field representative or developed by him in consultation with the teacher and representatives of the CIO union, if possible. A written plan, including teaching techniques to be used, is submitted by the teacher to the field representative at least two weeks before the class begins. The teacher varies his approach and emphasis during the program to meet the needs of the group. If a teacher is continually alert to the needs and interests of the students, he will often find that he has to alter his original plan of work. The course is adapted

32. Extension Teaching (N. Y. S. School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell Univ.) p. 11.



to meet the everchanging scene.<sup>33</sup>

Stewards generally like to take part in planning the course and in knowing what will be done at each session. They like to see evidence of their progress and are especially anxious to relate their instruction to their everyday experiences.

On occasion, they may become too anxious to discuss their experiences and immediate problems, and thus become impatient with general principles. One instructor relates that in a steward training course in collective bargaining, a local union president made it apparent that he was primarily interested in having a discussion center around matters currently of interest to the group because they were in the process of thrashing out particular issues with the company, i.e., rewriting their security clause in the contract, discussing new pension terms, the company's policy on compensation claims, etc. The instructor was placed in the position of convincing the group, and particularly the local union president, that a study of pertinent background material would be of assistance to them in handling these specific problems. The instructor's closing comment was that once this method of operation was accepted by the group, things went along smoothly and the class paid close attention.<sup>34\*</sup>

33. Ibid

34\*. Howard Gamser, "Principles and Problems in Collective Bargaining" (Local 2067, United Steelworkers of America, April-May, 1953) An asterisk indicates that the material was borrowed from the files of the N. Y. City Extension Division, N. Y. S. School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University.

Though this teacher was apparently successful in convincing his class of the merit of background material, it is quite probable that many other teachers were not quite as successful. High school and college students often remain unconvinced that for a proper study and understanding of current events and world affairs, they must also study ancient, modern and American history. Stewards are more likely to remain unconvinced of the particular merits of background material, especially if they are troubled by problems and exigencies in the shop. It is also quite probable that academicians have a greater propensity for emphasizing background material and underlying principles than would a union official teaching the same course.

Instructors at the School often come across problems dealing with the internal relationships in the union. One teacher found it expedient to clear with the international representative of the union on the question of interpreting and applying certain clauses of the contract in order to avoid any clash of ideas in handling these problems. The instructor recommended that, before sections of the contract were discussed with stewards in class, that they be examined jointly by instructor and international representative to make certain that no clause lead to friction between the higher and lower echelon officials of the union.<sup>35\*</sup>

Other problems which the instructor may face relate to the problem of internal fighting in young unions, specifically the International Union of Electrical Workers, CIO. Shop stewards in this union have attempted at times to outdo the heroics of the U. E. opposition (United Electrical Workers, ousted from CIO as a Communist dominated union)

35. Benjamin Roberts, Local 2063, United Steelworkers, 1949.



by calling wild-cat strikes. The instructor of this particular local of stewards utilized this incident and aroused a discussion summarizing the elements of responsibility in complying with the contract. The instructor met with the stewards after class and discussed all phases of the trouble. The stewards were advised to persuade the workers to return to their jobs. And as a fitting climax, the instructor was asked by both sides to act as mediator. Both parties reported a satisfactory conclusion.<sup>36\*</sup>

Though Cornell's program and cooperation is eagerly accepted and welcomed by most of the unions who work with them, it is rumored that there have been darker days. At one time, the Transport Workers Union had bitter experiences with training courses because the instruction and subject matter were "politicalized" to an extent which almost splintered the union. At the initial Cornell session for the Transport Workers in 1950, there were several minor disturbances and a near fracas which revealed unhealed wounds caused by earlier dissension. One particularly persistent heckler continued to challenge Cornell's integrity and the alleged standards of its staff in distinguishing opinion from fact. However, judging from the students' reactions by the end of the term, "Cornell is firmly entrenched", remarked the instructors.<sup>37\*</sup>

To just what extent Cornell has benefited the unions is probably incalculable. There is little doubt that they have enhanced individual members who have actively sought to improve their ability to participate in the union's activities. As an

- 36.\* Julius J. Manson, Local 475, International Union of Electrical Workers, 1952.  
 7\*. Julius J. Manson, Louis Yagoda, Local 100, Transport Workers Union, 1950.

example of those who welcome this opportunity for self-improvement, two members of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union approached the instructor of their shop steward training course, and, in confidence, asked to be called upon as much as possible so that they could develop the ability to express their thoughts articulately.<sup>38\*</sup>

### Role of the Steward

An evaluation of the success and effectiveness of a steward training program is contingent upon whether this training program realistically prepares him for his role in the shop, mill or factory. And here we have one of the original questions posed. What is the steward's role, and what is the directional trend in terms of influence and responsibility?

While the steward may be adequately trained to handle grievances in a training course, what part does he play in the grievance procedure? In many instances, the steward is by-passed in grievance procedure when the worker contacts the executive committeeman or chief steward. The worker will often "shop around" to find the union officer able to do the most for him.<sup>39</sup>

In other cases, where the grievance is brought to the steward, he may avoid handling the problem by "kicking it upstairs."<sup>40</sup> He may not only avoid

38. Daniel D. Parker, Local 1102, Retail, Wholesale Department Store Union, 1950.  
 39. George Strauss and Leonard R. Sayles, The Local Union: Its Place in the Industrial Plant, p. 35.  
 40. Sumner Shapiro, Interview ( :Textile Workers Union of America, March 31, 1954).



agitating, but quite often will resent the agitator in the shop for fear of "being made a fool of" should the grievance be worked out in an unsatisfactory manner.<sup>41</sup> This fear of failure, or of committing political suicide, often results in grievance procedures which completely by-pass the steward where it will be handled by a higher echelon official.

Traditionally, the first step in the grievance procedure has involved the foreman and the shop steward. But often many of the former functions of the foreman have been taken away. His decisions now depend on the policy of top management or on joint decision of top management and top labor. The first step of the grievance procedure has become nothing short of a vestige. As a result, the worker goes over his head and calls the shop committeeman at the outset.<sup>42</sup>

Another factor minimizing the steward's role in the grievance procedure is that contracts are becoming more complex and require a greater amount of interpretation. Many stewards are incapable of such work. In addition, some areas in many contracts are not subject to the grievance procedure, such as pensions, insurance and hospitalization plans, and stewards are unable to answer questions about these matters which often come up.

Where a steward is elected because he has won a popularity contest, and not necessarily because

he is the most competent, union officers feel that the committee will do a better job of handling grievances. This is especially true where the steward is afraid of the foreman and has accepted the job of steward because it will give him top seniority.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, there are some stewards who have been in office since the union came into the plant, and who still play a significant role in the grievance procedure. Many of these stewards are as familiar with contract clauses and collective bargaining techniques as is the top leadership. These older men who are highly trade union conscious often make highly effective stewards and accept the increased responsibilities in handling grievances as contracts change and broaden year after year.

However, for the many stewards who do not have the benefit of these many years of experience, training courses offer the only opportunity for them to acquire the skill, knowledge and understanding of increasingly complex contracts and increasingly complex problems of human behavior. If the steward's role is declining, education and training can lead to competency and confidence, and serve to restore, and enhance the role of the steward.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Lois Remmers Dean, *Front Office Leadership: The Decline of Militancy in Two Union Locals* (Cornell University: 1953) p. 210.



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